

I YOUNG NAREN

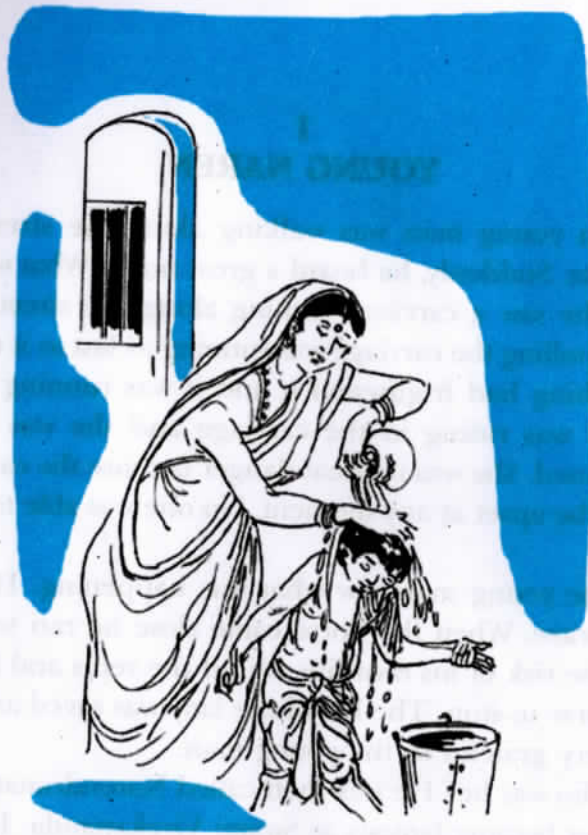
ONCE a young man was walking along the streets of Calcutta. Suddenly, he heard a great noise. What was it? Then he saw a carriage rushing along the street. The horse pulling the carriage was running as fast as it could. Something had frightened it and it was running away. A lady was riding in the carriage and she was badly frightened. She was in great danger because the carriage might be upset at any moment. No one was able to help her.

The young man saw what was happening. He was very brave. When the horse came close he ran towards it at the risk of his own life, seized the reins and forced the horse to stop. The life of the lady was saved and she was very grateful to the young man.

Who was he? He was then called Narendranath, but he later became famous as Swami Vivekananda. He was born in a famous Datta family who lived in the Simla section of Calcutta. Sri Viswanath Datta was a lawyer. He had studied many things and was respected by everyone. His wife was Bhuvaneshwari Devi. She was like a queen in appearance as well as behaviour. Everyone loved and respected her.

On the 12th of January, 1863, their first son was born. They named him Narendranath.

Naren was a naughty child, and sometimes Bhuvaneshwari Devi found it extremely hard to control him.



If cold water was poured on his head at the same time chanting the name of Shiva in his ear, the child would quiet down.

However, she found that even when Naren grew extremely restless, if cold water was poured on his head at the same time chanting the name of Shiva in his ear, the child would quiet down. Indeed, at times this was the only method with which to bring him under control.

Young Naren learned many things from his mother, and she told him stories from the Mahabharata and the



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Ramayana. Naren loved to hear the story of Sri Rama. He bought a small clay image of Sita-Rama and worshipped it with flowers. He liked to listen to the reading of the Ramayana. Once he stayed in a banana grove for a long time, hoping to see Sri Hanumana, for he had heard that that was a favourite place of this heroic devotee of Rama.

He also liked to play at meditation. He would take one or two of his friends to a lonely place and they would sit in front of an image of Sita-Rama or Shiva. Then Naren would meditate and would think about God. He would get lost in his thoughts about God and for a time he would not see or feel anything around him. Once a cobra came gliding along the ground. The other boys were frightened and ran away, but Naren stayed where he was. They shouted at him but he did not hear them. After some time the snake went away. Later, his parents asked Naren why he had not run away. He replied, "I did not know anything about the snake. I was feeling very happy."

Naren was happy when Sadhus visited their house. He sometimes gave them valuable things. Once he gave a piece of new cloth which he was wearing to a Sadhu. After that his parents locked him up whenever Sadhus came to the house. But when Naren saw the Sadhus he would throw things to them through the window. Now and then he said that he would become a Sadhu himself some day.

Naren's father, as we have said, was a lawyer. Many people came to see him. He entertained them and offered them tobacco to smoke. There were different pipes for the different castes. But caste was a great mystery to Naren. Why was a member of one caste not allowed to eat with members of other castes? Why were there different tobacco pipes for the different castes? There was a pipe for the Muslims also. What would happen if he smoked from all the pipes? Would there be an explosion? Would the roof fall down? Naren

decided to find out for himself. He took a whiff from one pipe. Nothing happened. He tried all the pipes in turn and took a whiff from each of them. Still nothing happened. Just then his father walked into the room and asked him what he was doing. Naren replied, "O father, why, I was trying to see what would happen if I broke caste." His father laughed and went into his study.

II

YOUNG NAREN AT SCHOOL AND AT PLAY

WHEN he was six years old Naren began his studies. He did not go to school at first as his parents got a teacher for him. He quickly learned to read and write. His memory was very good and he could understand a lesson after hearing his teacher read it once.

When he was seven Naren was sent to the Metropolitan Institution. This school was started by Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Narendranath was very intelligent and learned his lessons quickly. He became a leader among the boys. He enjoyed games very much. He would eat his lunch quickly and would be the first to run to the playground. Some of the games were jumping, running, boxing and playing with marbles. Sometimes he invented new games.

Sometimes Naren turned the classroom into a playground. He would talk to his friends and tell them stories even while the teacher was present. Once the teacher saw them talking. He turned to Naren and his

friends and asked them to repeat the lesson. All were silent except Naren, who was able to listen to the lesson and talk to his friends at the same time. He was able to answer correctly all the questions put by the teacher. Then the teacher asked them who had been talking. The boys pointed to Naren. The teacher did not believe them and made them stand up as a punishment. Naren stood up also. The teacher told him that he need not stand, but Naren continued to do so. He said, "I must, for it was I who was talking."

One of Naren's favourite games was "King and Court". Naren, of course, was always the King. The Court was held on a flight of stairs leading from the courtyard to the worship room. Naren took the highest step for his royal throne. He would then appoint his officials. One boy would be made Prime Minister and another the Commander-in-chief of the armies. Some were made Tributary Princes or other government officers. Then they took their places on the lower steps according to their rank. In this way Naren, the King, held his Court. As King he gave orders, settled disputes, or put down rebellions. No one was allowed to disobey the King's orders. Sometimes he would order severe punishment to be given to a supposed rebel. The rebel would try to escape but the King's men would chase him around the house and would finally capture him amidst much noise and excited shouting.

Naren liked animals very much and he would play with the family cow. He also kept pet animals and birds. Among these were a monkey, a goat, a peacock, some pigeons and two or three guinea-pigs.



But Naren and one or two of his friends stayed to help the sailor.

The coachman was a special friend of Naren, and he would often be found having intimate talks with him. Naren also thought that the syce or groom was a very grand person. He sat in the front of the carriage wearing a big turban and swinging a whip. Naren sometimes said that when he grew up he would like to be a syce.

He tried his hand at many games. Once in a while he played at cooking also. He bought vegetables and

spices and cooked various dishes. He was really a good cook. Another time he organized a group of boys to stage plays. Then he became interested in physical exercise. He first started a gymnasium in his own courtyard, and later joined the gymnasium of a neighbour. He took lessons in fencing, lathi-play, wrestling and other sports.

Once, Naren and his friends were trying to set up a heavy trapeze. It was a difficult job for young boys, but though many people gathered to watch no one offered to help them. Naren noticed a strong British sailor in the crowd. He went to him and asked him to help them. The sailor agreed. He started to help them, but suddenly the trapeze slipped and hit the sailor. He fell down unconscious. Most of the people thought the sailor had been killed and ran away from the scene, but Naren and one or two of his friends stayed to help the sailor. Naren tore his dhoti to make bandages. He bandaged the wound and then sprinkled water on the sailor's face and fanned him gently. After some time the sailor regained consciousness. Naren then helped him to go to a neighbouring school-house where he could stay, and then sent for a doctor. After a week the sailor recovered and went away. Before he left Naren collected some money from his friends and gave it to the sailor.

III

NAREN AND HIS FRIENDS

NAREN and his friends went to see many interesting places in Calcutta. One day Naren and a group of boys

visited the Nawab's Zoological Gardens at Metiaburuz, near Calcutta. They went by boat. As they were returning one of the boys got sick and dirtied the boat. The boatmen became angry and ordered the boys to clean the boat. They refused, and instead offered to pay double the fare. The boatmen would not accept the offer. When they reached the ghat they would not allow the boys to go ashore. They threatened and abused the boys. Naren, however, was able to jump ashore. He found two British soldiers walking nearby and asked them for help. They went with him. They guessed what was happening and shouted at the boatmen, ordering them to release the boys. The boatmen got frightened and at once set the boys free.

Once, when Naren was about eleven, a British man-of-war (a warship) visited the port of Calcutta. Many people went to see the ship and Naren and his friends also wanted to see it. In order to do so they had to obtain a pass from an important British official. Naren filled in an application form and went to the building where the official stayed. Many people were going in, but the doorkeeper thought that Naren was too young and would not let him go in. Naren stood outside wondering what to do. He saw that all the people were going to a certain room on the first floor. He thought that perhaps there was another entrance, so he walked round to the back of the building, where he found a staircase. There was no doorkeeper there, so he went up to the first floor. He pushed aside a curtain and found himself in the room where the other people were waiting. He took his place in the queue and the British



A Brahma-daitya lives there. If you disturb him he will break your necks. Beware that you don't climb that tree again.

official signed his application without question. Naren went out by the main entrance. The doorkeeper was surprised to see him leave. He said, "How did you get in?" Naren replied, "Oh, don't you know that I am a magician?"

There was a flowering tree in the compound of one of Naren's friends. Naren and his friends used to climb this tree and swing from the branches. Naren would hang from a branch by his legs, swing back and forth and finally somersault to the ground. An old man lived at that house, and he did not like to see them swinging in the tree, for it was risky. One day he called Naren and his friends and said, "Look, don't you know there is a ghost in that tree? A Brahma-daitya lives there. If you disturb him he will break your necks. Beware that you don't climb that tree again."

This was enough to frighten the other boys, but not Naren. As soon as the old man was out of sight Naren went and climbed the tree again. His friends asked, "How do you dare do that, Naren? Didn't you hear what the old man said?"

Naren laughed and said, "Oh what fools you are! I have climbed this tree so many times. If the old man's story were true my neck would have been broken long ago."

IV NAREN GROWS UP

As Naren grew older he took more interest in reading books and did not play games so much. He did well in his school work, but his father took him away from Calcutta for two years and he stopped going to school. When he returned he had to do three years' work in one year. When the time for examination drew near he

studied very hard. He passed the Entrance Examination in the first division. He was the only student from his school to do so that year. He then went to the Presidency College for one year. The next year he joined the General Assembly's Institution, now known as the Scottish Church College. The professors at the latter college were surprised to see how intelligent Naren was. The Principal, Prof. W. W. Hastie, said that he had never seen another boy like Naren. Naren studied hard and read many books of all kinds and on all subjects. He passed the First Arts Examination in 1881 and obtained his B.A. degree in 1884.

Naren also studied music for four or five years. He learned to play several instruments, and he became known as a very good singer also. Because he sang well he was often invited to parties. He enjoyed the fun at parties, but he found more pleasure in intellectual discussions. He would often argue about serious subjects with his friends and sometimes with older people. He was very good at argument and few people could match his skill.

At this time Naren became interested in the problems of religion. Like many other young men at that time Naren became a member of the Brahmo Samaj and attended the lectures of Sri Keshab Chandra Sen. He was often asked to sing songs at the Samaj. But the question which troubled him most was whether there is a God or not and whether anyone had seen Him. He visited many religious leaders, including Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, for an answer to this question, but none could satisfy his doubts.

V

NAREN MEETS SRI RAMAKRISHNA

NAREN was interested in religion, but he had lost faith in many of the teachings of Hinduism. He did not know what to believe. He had gone to many religious people, but they could not help him. One day he decided to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna was a great



Naren sang two songs at his request

Hindu saint. He came from a village called Kamarpukur in the Hooghly District. At that time he was living at the Kali Temple of Dakshineswar, near Calcutta. He lived a life of prayer and meditation and thought always of God. Many people came to him and he solved their spiritual problems.

Naren had heard about Sri Ramakrishna from his teacher, Prof. Hastie, and from one of his relatives. He had also seen him at the house of this relative in Calcutta. Now he decided to visit him at Dakshineswar, to see whether Sri Ramakrishna could help him in any way. Naren took a few friends with him. Sri Ramakrishna received them kindly, and Naren sang two songs at his request. Then Sri Ramakrishna took him into another room. He treated Naren as if he were a dear friend who had just returned from a long journey. He even wept for joy, and fed Naren with sweets with his own hands. Naren could not understand all this. He thought that perhaps Sri Ramakrishna was a madman, but he promised to come again. When they returned to the other room Sri Ramakrishna began to speak about God. He said that we can see and speak to God just as we see and speak to our friends. Naren did not know what to think. Sri Ramakrishna had acted in a strange way but he also seemed to be a great saint.

About a month later Naren came again, this time alone. Sri Ramakrishna treated him kindly and asked him to sit by his side. Then he touched Naren. At this touch Naren had a strange experience. The walls and the room seemed to whirl round and round and then vanish. He thought that he was about to die and he

became frightened. He cried out, "What is this that you are doing to me? I have my parents at home."

Sri Ramakrishna laughed and began to stroke Naren's chest. He said, "All right, let it rest now. Everything will come in time." At his touch the strange experience was gone and Naren found everything the same as it had been before.

A similar thing happened when Naren visited Sri Ramakrishna for the third time. He again lost consciousness at the touch of Sri Ramakrishna. He could not understand what had happened. He had a strong body and mind, but this saint could do with him whatever he liked by a mere touch. He could not explain how it happened. However, he understood that Sri Ramakrishna was no ordinary person. He came to have deep respect for him though there were still many unanswered questions in his mind.

VI THE MASTER AND THE DISCIPLE

NAREN now began to visit Sri Ramakrishna as often as he could. He felt that Sri Ramakrishna loved him more than anyone else did. He was always eager to see him.

Sri Ramakrishna was confident that Naren would some day become a great man. He mentioned this to his other devotees telling them about Naren's many good qualities. He said that other devotees were like stars, but Naren was like the sun. He said that Naren was a liberated soul who had been born to help other



Sri Ramakrishna said, "If you do not accept my views why do you come to me?"

people. Sri Ramakrishna had great confidence in Naren; he knew that he could never do anything wrong.

Naren also felt deep love for Sri Ramakrishna. Although busy with his studies he often went to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was delighted with Naren's songs and often went into Samadhi listening to them. Naren had an independent mind; he would not

believe anything unless he could understand it for himself. Many times he would argue with Sri Ramakrishna if what he said was not logical to him. Once Sri Ramakrishna said, "If you do not accept my views why do you come to me?"

Naren replied, "I come because I love you. But that does not mean that I will accept your words without thinking for myself." Instead of being annoyed Sri Ramakrishna was pleased to hear this; he was glad that Naren was so independent-minded.

And so time went on. Naren became more and more devoted to Sri Ramakrishna, who gave him various instructions which he followed. Sri Ramakrishna taught him how to meditate, and he became more and more interested in meditation and other spiritual practices.

But Naren had to pass through a time of great trouble. Early in 1884 his father died. Naren was the eldest son and so he became the head of the family. His father had never saved any money and Naren found it difficult even to get enough food for the family to eat. He often went without food so that his family might have more. He began to look for a job, but without success. Later, he worked in a lawyer's office, as a school teacher and at other such jobs. They were not permanent and he had difficulty in supporting his family. In spite of these difficulties they at least had a house to live in. But some dispute arose over this also. Some of his relatives chose this time to claim a large part of the house as theirs. The case went to court where it dragged on for a long time. Luckily the case was decided in favour of Naren's family.

VII AT THE COSSIPORE GARDEN-HOUSE

NAREN'S life had been completely upset by his father's death. His mind was in a turmoil. He found peace only at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. In 1885 Sri Ramakrishna began to suffer from a sore in his throat. It became worse and worse and finally it was learned that he had cancer, a terrible disease. His disciples and devotees came forward to help him. A garden-house was rented for him at Cossipore. He moved there and many of his young disciples began to stay there and nurse him.

Naren was one of those who spent most of their time at Cossipore. He sometimes had to go to Calcutta on family business, but he spent the rest of his time with Sri Ramakrishna. Naren and the other disciples devoted themselves to the service of their Master. Naren was their leader. When they had time they would gather together and sing, study, or discuss the great qualities of Sri Ramakrishna. Naren wanted very much to realize God, to see God, for he felt that this was the only purpose of life. Sri Ramakrishna gave him many hints about how to meditate, and he spent much time in meditation. He had wonderful experiences during meditation; sometimes he would completely forget the outside world.

Once Naren and Sri Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great poet and dramatist, sat under a tree for meditation. Girish tried to meditate, but there were too many mosquitoes. They buzzed around his head and bit him and he could not meditate. He wondered if Naren was able to meditate, so he opened his eyes to see what he was doing. He was

surprised to see that mosquitoes covered Naren's body like a blanket. But Naren did not seem to feel anything since he was lost in meditation.

One evening Naren had the highest spiritual experience. While meditating he forgot the outside world and even his own body. He thought of nothing but God and God alone. His mind was literally filled with God. He felt great joy and happiness. This experience is called Samadhi.

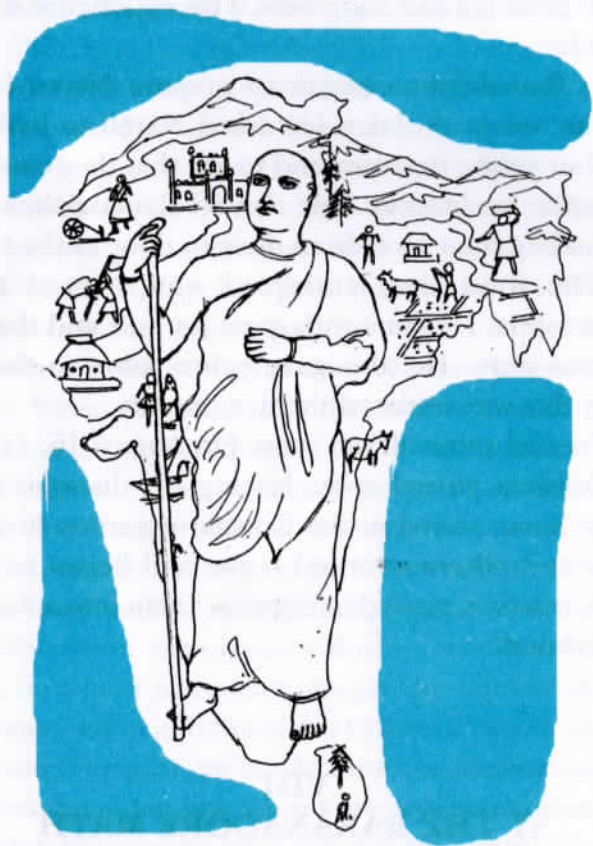
Sri Ramakrishna began to prepare Naren for the work he was to do later. He asked Naren to look after the other young devotees and to see that they continued to practise meditation. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked them to beg their food from door to door as the Sadhus do. The food they collected was offered to Sri Ramakrishna. He ate it with great joy and said that such food was pure. He also gave ochre robes to the boys and in this way initiated them as monks.

The end came all too soon. On August 16, 1886 Sri Ramakrishna passed away, leaving his disciples full of sorrow. Some stayed at the Cossipore garden-house for a time and others returned home and began to study: Naren, however, started to organize them into a monastic brotherhood.

VIII AT THE BARANAGORE MATH

THE young monks could not stay at Cossipore for long, since the rent of the house was too high, but with the

help of a devotee they rented a smaller house at Baranagore. Here they established the first monastery of the Ramakrishna Order. The house was old and decayed; the garden was full of weeds; cobras lived under the ground floor of the house and local people believed there were ghosts in the house. It was a strange place, but the young monks lived there because the rent was



Swamiji went to Banaras and many other places and then wandered through the Himalayas.

cheap. It was also quiet and peaceful. They were very poor. There were hardly enough clothes and their food was not good. For months they had nothing to eat but rice and some boiled leaves.

Naren and the others cared nothing for this. They thought only of God. Naren was the leader. He went to those boys who had returned home and persuaded them to join the monastery. Naren looked after them and inspired them to think of God. They meditated for long hours. They sang songs. They discussed the religious ideas of all sects and religions. They tried to follow everything that Sri Ramakrishna had taught them.

During this period they took the monastic vows of sannyasa. They also took new names. Naren, however, did not take a permanent name, and when he wandered through India he changed his name now and then. Sometimes he used the name 'Swami Vividishananda' and sometimes other names. When people speak of him now they often call him 'Swamiji'.

IX WANDERING DAYS

SWAMIJI (Naren) stayed at the Baranagore Math for two years. Some of the other monks left the Math and began to wander from one place to another. Hindu monks have been doing this for thousands of years. Swamiji also became restless. In 1888 he left the Math and went to Banaras for a week. While there, he met two famous saints—Trailanga Swami and Swami Bhaskarananda.

An interesting incident happened at that time. One day Swamiji was returning from a visit to the temple of Mother Durga. Suddenly, a troop of monkeys began to run after him. Swamiji was afraid they might bite him and he began to run away. But the monkeys kept on chasing him. He ran as fast as he could, but they still kept on his heels. He did not know what to do as he was losing his breath. Just then an old sannyasin who happened to pass that way called out to him, "Stop ! Face the brutes." Swamiji stopped, turned around and stood facing the monkeys. When he did this the monkeys got frightened and ran away. Swamiji then had a good laugh over this.

He later visited many other cities in north India. At Hathras the railway station master, Sri Sharat Chandra Gupta, became his disciple. He followed Swamiji and later took the name 'Swami Sadananda'. They went together to Hrishikesh and spent some time there in meditation. But the life was hard and their health suffered. They had to return to the Baranagore Math.

After a year Swamiji again began to wander. He went to Ghazipur where he met the famous saint, Pavhari Baba. He then returned to Calcutta. In 1890 he left the Baranagore Math and did not return for many years. One of his brother disciples went with him. They went to Banaras and many other places and then wandered through the Himalayas. They stopped at Hrishikesh but suffered from fever. Later, Swamiji came down and spent several weeks at Meerut. Some of his brother monks joined him there for a time.

Many things happened to Swamiji while he was wandering, some good and some bad. Often he had nothing to eat for a long time and often he was tired and hungry. But he also met many kind-hearted people who helped him. Often it was the poor and lowly who gave him food and shelter. Once he was sitting in the hot sun at a railway station in Uttar Pradesh. He had not eaten anything for over a day and he could not even get a drink of water because he had no money. A Baniya began to taunt Swamiji. He did not think that men should become monks. He said to Swamiji, "See what nice food I am eating. See the nice cold water I have to drink. I earn money and so I have all these good things. You do not earn money and so you are starving." The Swami said nothing. But a wonderful thing happened after a little while. A sweetmeat seller appeared and offered food to Swamiji. He spread a mat and laid out food and water before Swamiji. He then begged him to eat the food.

Swamiji said, "You must be mistaken, my good man. I do not remember having seen you before."

But the sweetmeat-seller said, "No, Babaji, you are the man I saw in my dream. Sri Ramji himself appeared to me and told me to take these good things to you at the railway station. When I came here I recognized you at once. Please take your food while it is fresh." Tears of gratitude flowed from Swamiji's eyes and he thanked the sweetmeat-seller again and again. But the sweetmeat-seller said that it was all the will of Sri Ramji. The Baniya was thunderstruck to see all this. He stood staring at the scene. He understood his mistake and fell at Swamiji's feet and begged his pardon.

Leaving Meerut Swamiji decided to wander about alone. He forbade his brother monks to follow him and left for Rajputana, the land of heroes. When Swamiji was at Alwar he had a very interesting discussion with Prince Mangal Singh. The Prince said that he did not believe in image-worship because he could not worship wood, stone or metal. In answer, Swamiji asked for a picture of the Prince to be given to him. Holding the picture in his hand, Swamiji asked the Dewan of the Prince to spit on it. At this the Dewan grew terrified and said: "What! Swamiji! This is the likeness of our Maharaja. How can I do such a thing?" Swamiji now said to the Prince: "See, Your Highness, though you are not actually present in the picture your devoted servant sees the shadow of your form in it. This picture is only a piece of paper; but your servants treat it with respect because it reminds them of Your Highness. Similarly, devotees worship God in an image because it brings to their mind some special form of God and helps them to concentrate. They actually worship the same one God and not the stone or metal as such. At this the Maharaja said with folded hands: "Swamiji, till now I did not understand the meaning of image worship. You have opened my eyes."

Swamiji visited many other places and at Mt. Abu he met the Maharaja of Khetri. Later he went to Khetri with the Maharaja. The Maharaja became his devoted disciple and they had many long talks together. The Swami loved the Maharaja dearly and there was a very wonderful relationship between them. The Maharaja was later able to help Swamiji in many ways.



*Holding the picture in his hand,
Swamiji asked the Dewan of the Prince to spit on it.*

But Swamiji again became eager to wander. He left Khetri and passed through the Bombay Presidency and much of south India. He stayed for some time with the Maharaja of Mysore, who became his great friend and admirer. The Maharaja offered to help him with his mission. He made a recording of Swamiji's voice and kept it in the palace for many years.

Swamiji left Mysore for Rameswaram. He stopped on the way at Madurai where he met the Raja of Ramnad. The Raja was a very good man and a good ruler. He became an admirer and disciple of Swamiji, and Swamiji explained to him many of his ideas for the uplift of India. The Raja promised to help him. Swamiji next went to Rameswaram and then to Kanyakumari, the southernmost part of India. He crossed over to a big rock in the ocean and sat there and thought about his motherland. He had seen the whole of India, from north to south and from east to west. He had seen much poverty and suffering and was able to understand the difficulties of the people. Yes, the common people of India were very poor, but Swamiji also saw how good they were, how gentle and kind-hearted. They had to do much hard work for which they received very little money.

Swamiji felt deeply for the people and was anxious to do something for them. But what could he, a poor homeless monk, do? He had appealed to many princes, to rich and educated people; he had appealed to young students also. They all listened to him and admired him as a monk and teacher, but they did nothing to put his ideas into practice. He felt depressed and wondered what he should do next to help his countrymen.

But Swamiji was a follower of Sri Ramakrishna, and he always tried to carry out the will of his Master. He now felt that Sri Ramakrishna wanted him to go to America to attend a Parliament of Religions. It was a strange and distant land, and it would not be easy to go there. But he also felt that, somehow, he would be able



Swamiji crossed over to a big rock in the ocean and sat there and thought about his motherland.

to help his own country better from the West. To fulfil the will of God, then, he decided to make the journey to America.... This is the resolve he made while sitting on the rock at Kanyakumari.

Swamiji next went to Madras where many intelligent young men became his enthusiastic followers. He gave several talks before different groups and met many important and educated people. He told them about

his idea of going to America. His young disciples became very enthusiastic about this, and they began to raise money for the ticket.

At this time the Maharaja of Khetri invited Swamiji to visit his capital again. It was the Maharaja who gave the Swami a first class ticket on a ship going to Canada and many things he needed for the trip. The Maharaja also suggested that he take the name 'Vivekananda'. Swamiji accepted this name and for the rest of his life he was known as Swami Vivekananda.

X TO AMERICA

SWAMI Vivekananda sailed from Bombay on May 31, 1893. The ship stopped at Ceylon, Singapore, Hong Kong and other ports in China and Japan. Swamiji enjoyed the trip very much. The ship then sailed to Vancouver, Canada. Swamiji left Vancouver by train for Chicago. On the train a rich, cultured lady named Miss Sanborn was impressed by his noble personality and her conversation with him. She said to Swamiji, "If you ever come to my home near Boston, I shall be happy to have you as my guest and introduce you to persons of learning and culture." Swamiji reached Chicago in the middle of July. It was a strange new world. He visited the Chicago World's Fair where the Parliament of Religions was to be held. He was surprised to see all the exhibits and scientific inventions. He marvelled at the machinery, the industrial products and the arts.

After a few days Swamiji went to the Information Bureau to find out about the Parliament of Religions. He was dismayed to learn that the Parliament would not open until September. Moreover, they told him that he could not be accepted as a delegate at the Parliament because he had no papers to show that he represented any group or sect. They also told him that the time for admission was already past. This news was a great blow. Worse still, he was fast running out of money. He had to wait almost two months for the Parliament, but his money would soon be spent and then he would have to starve.

Swamiji left Chicago and went to Miss Sanborn's place near Boston, as he was told he could live there more cheaply than in Chicago. He also remembered Miss Sanborn's cordial invitation to visit her home. While in her home he met Prof. J. H. Wright of Harvard University. He had a long discussion with the Professor and talked about many different subjects with him. Prof. Wright recognized Swamiji's great scholarship and said that he should represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions. Swamiji told him that he had no official letter from any organization. The Professor replied, "To ask you, Swami, for credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine."

Professor Wright arranged everything for Swamiji. He wrote to the Chairman of the Committee of the Parliament of Religions introducing Swamiji. In this letter he said, "Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together." He also presented Swamiji with a ticket to Chicago. Swamiji was very happy to see how God's purpose was being fulfilled.



Swamiji sat down by the side of the street, determined to wait until something happened. Just then the door of a nearby house opened and a lady came out.

When Swamiji reached Chicago he found that he had lost the address of the Committee. He did not know where to go. He was tired, and finding no other place he spent the night in a large empty box. In the morning he began to walk along a street where rich people lived in large houses. Like a sannyasin he began to beg for

food from door to door. But he was treated rudely and even the servants insulted him, for begging is condemned in the West. He did not know what to do. At last he decided just to wait for the will of God. If God had brought him to the West for some purpose, then he would look after him. So he sat down by the side of the street, determined to wait until something happened. Just then the door of a nearby house opened and a lady came out. She went up to Swamiji and asked him, "Sir, are you a delegate to the Parliament of Religions?" Swamiji told her all about himself. The lady invited him into her home and instructed the servants to look after him. She saw that he had breakfast and then took him to the office of the Parliament. Swamiji gave his letter of introduction and was gladly accepted as a delegate. The lady who helped him was Mrs. George W. Hale. She, her husband and their children became close friends of Swamiji.

XI AT THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

THE Parliament of Religions opened on Monday, September 11, 1893. It was held in a large building called the Hall of Columbus. Swami Vivekananda sat on the platform at the front with the other delegates. Cardinal Gibbons of the Roman Catholic Church sat in the centre. On both sides were delegates representing nearly all countries and religions. There were a few others from India. Majumdar and Nagarkar represented

the Brahmo Samaj; Dharmapala represented the Buddhists of Ceylon, and Chakravorty and Mrs. Besant represented Theosophy. There was a large audience of four thousand people.

It was a grand occasion, and Swami Vivekananda felt nervous at the sight of so many people. The Chairman several times requested him to speak, but he would not agree. Late in the afternoon the Chairman announced his name without asking him. Swamiji now had no choice, so he stood up and faced the audience. He began by saying: "Sisters and brothers of America." He could not say more. The audience was tremendously moved by the way he addressed them and they began to clap their hands and cheer. Hundreds of people rose to their feet, shouting and cheering. The cheering continued for several minutes. When silence was restored Swamiji continued his speech. It was a short speech, but in it he presented Hinduism as a religion which taught that all religions are true and that all should be accepted. Other speakers had spoken only of their particular religion. Swamiji spoke of the truth in all religions. The audience liked the speech very much. In fact, they liked Swamiji better than any of the other speakers. Swamiji became famous overnight, and the newspapers were full of praise of him.

Swami Vivekananda gave several speeches at the Parliament, the most famous being his "Paper on Hinduism". Swamiji was always the favourite, and his speeches were always kept till the end so that the people would stay. Sometimes large numbers of people became tired and started to leave. Then the Chairman would



"Sisters and brothers of America."

say that Swami Vivekananda would give a short speech before the meeting closed. All the people would then wait happily to hear Swamiji. Large pictures of Swamiji were printed and displayed in the streets of Chicago. Everyone spoke about him.

The newspapers of India were also filled with the news of his triumph at Chicago, and the Indian people

were very proud of his great success. His brother monks at Baranagore were especially happy when they learned that their 'Naren' was the famous Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda did not forget the poor people of India. He kept thinking about them and how they could be helped. After he became famous many rich



Swamiji could not use the bed, and slept on the floor.

people invited him to their homes. But he could not enjoy the comforts which were offered to him. On the very night of his triumph at the Parliament he had been the guest of a rich man and had been given a big comfortable bed to sleep on. Swamiji could not use the bed. How could he? The thought of the poor people of India came to his mind and he slept on the floor.

XII

THE SPIRITUAL TEACHER IN AMERICA

THE Parliament of Religions was over and Swami Vivekananda was now a famous man. He received many invitations to speak before clubs, churches, and many other groups. Later, he accepted an offer from a lecture bureau and he then travelled far and wide giving lectures. He had all the qualities required to be a good speaker—voice, language and appearance—and his ideas also attracted people. What lofty things he said! He was in demand all over America. It was very hard work. He had to travel long distances and sometimes he had to give many lectures a day. He often felt very tired. Sometimes his mind also was tired and he would wonder what to say in his lecture the next day. Then a strange thing would happen. When he went to bed at night he would hear a voice talking to him or giving a lecture. He would get many new ideas in this way.

Yes, it was hard work, and yet he continued to travel and give lectures for about one year. There was great excitement wherever he went and the newspapers wrote

long articles about him. Once he gave a lecture in a western town where there were some cowboys. They heard him say that a spiritual man was not disturbed by what happened around him. They decided to test him. He spoke to them in the open air, standing on a wooden tub. Suddenly there was a terrible noise. The cowboys were shooting their guns and bullets went whizzing past Swamiji's ears. The men were testing him. But Swamiji paid no attention to the shots and continued his lecture. Afterwards, the cowboys came to him and said that he was "a right good fellow".

Late in 1894 Swamiji decided that he had done enough travelling. He now decided to stay in one place and train a number of disciples to carry on the work. He began to live in New York and gave a series of lectures. A group of sincere people gathered round him and followed his teachings. This work was so successful that he started a Vedanta Society there. He held classes and gave lectures in which he said that God is in all men. Men can see God if they pray and meditate. He taught them how to do this. He also taught them that all religions are true. People came to him for help and advice and some became his disciples. Among them there were many important people.

XIII

AT THE THOUSAND ISLAND PARK

THE St. Lawrence River forms part of the boundary of New York State and in one place there are so many

islands that they are called the Thousand Islands. Early in June, 1895, Swamiji went to the Thousand Island Park and stayed there for seven weeks. Twelve students also went at different times and stayed with him. It was a beautiful place. They could look out over the river and see many islands. It was quiet, with nothing to hear but the wind and the songs of the birds. But the best thing for the disciples was to listen to Swamiji. Swamiji was at his best here. Every evening he would teach the students about Vedanta* and the Hindu religion. Once he spoke to them until very late at night. The full moon rose and set but none of them knew that so much time had passed.

But it was not always religion that they had. There was much laughter and joy also. Swamiji would cut jokes and make them laugh and laugh. Sometimes they would go for a picnic. Occasionally Swamiji would cook for them. This would alarm the devotees for it would mean much dish-washing for them afterwards. He would also use lots of spices making the food rich and hot. The devotees liked his cooking except for the spices, which burned their tongues. But they ate the food just the same. Had it not been cooked by Swamiji?

Swamiji was full of spiritual power and he had a great influence on the devotees. They all became his

*Vedanta is based on the Vedas and also includes the spiritual teachings of the saints and sages that India has produced.

disciples. Two of them served him faithfully as long as they lived. One was Sister Christine, who later worked in India. The other was Mr. J. J. Goodwin, who took down many of Swamiji's lectures and who also followed him to India, where he died at a young age. Another of Swamiji's disciples, Miss Waldo, wrote down many of the things he spoke at the Thousand Island Park. These have been published in a book called "Inspired Talks". He also wrote the poem "Song of the Sannyasin" at this time.

After he left the Thousand Island Park Swamiji went to England for two months. Then he returned to New York as he was badly needed to carry on the work there. As before, he gave lectures and talked to people who came to him for spiritual help. Three books were published from his lectures—"Jnana Yoga", "Raja Yoga" and "Karma Yoga". These books immediately became popular. Swamiji's fame as a religious teacher spread far and wide and many important people became his friends and disciples. He had the dream of combining the best qualities of India and America, of the East and the West. Religious teachers would go to the West and teach spirituality. The Western devotees would go to India and teach science, industry, organization and co-operation.

Swamiji was very tired when his work in America ended. He had not spared himself. Whenever he did anything he would think of nothing else. Swamiji was very strong, but he worked so hard that even his strong body become weakened.

XIV ENGLAND AND EUROPE

SWAMIJI, as we said, first visited England in September, 1895. He was received by friends, Miss Henriette Muller and Mr. E. T. Sturdy. After a few days he began to hold a few small classes in the evenings. During the day he visited many interesting places in London. He soon became well known, and his classes grew bigger and bigger. Many people went to visit him and newspapers printed reports of his lectures. The work was a great success.

However, Swamiji could not stay long and he had to return to America to continue the work there. He sailed for England the second time on April 15, 1896. He was very happy when he reached London, for a brother monk, Swami Saradananda, was there waiting for him. It was a joyful occasion. He had not seen any of his brother monks for several years and they had much to talk about. Swamiji also had many plans for the work in India, which he told to Swami Saradananda.

Swamiji again began to hold classes and give lectures about Vedanta. His work was even more successful than before and he had to go to many places to give talks. One thing he enjoyed very much was a visit to Prof. Max Muller. The Professor was teaching at Oxford University. He was a great student of India, Hinduism and Sanskrit learning. They had a long conversation. Swamiji and Prof. Max Muller became fast friends and often wrote letters to each other.

The Professor had already written an article about Sri Ramakrishna, and he asked Swamiji for more information. Swamiji asked Swami Saradananda to help Prof. Muller. Material was sent from India and as a result Prof. Max Muller wrote a book about Sri Ramakrishna. It was a very good book, and it helped Swami Vivekananda in his work.

Swami Vivekananda made many other friends and disciples in England. The best known of these was Miss Margaret Noble, who later became famous as Sister Nivedita. Two other faithful disciples were Mr. & Mrs. Sevier. They returned to India with Swamiji and were very helpful to him in his work there.

After some time three of Swamiji's friends invited him to go on a tour of Europe, and he was glad to accept this invitation. They went to Switzerland where Swamiji was very happy to see the mountains and snow-peaks of the Alps. The scenery was beautiful. He stayed for two weeks in a small village and enjoyed the beauty, peace and silence. He became again the silent, meditating monk of his earlier days. His health also improved. He often went on walks. Once he nearly had an accident. He was walking on a mountain path with his friends. He had been reciting passages from the Upanishads, and had become absorbed in spiritual thoughts. He fell behind the others and did not pay much attention to where he was going. As there was snow he carried a stick and planted it firmly on the ground at every step. Suddenly, the stick broke through the snow and ice, and a deep crevice appeared just in front of him. He nearly fell into it, but somehow kept his balance. He walked

rapidly up to his friends and called out, "I have been saved by the grace of the Lord." His friends were careful not to let Swamiji walk alone after that.

Swamiji then visited Germany, where he enjoyed meeting Prof. Paul Deussen, a great German Sanskrit scholar. They had long conversations and visited many places together. Prof. Deussen also joined the party when Swamiji returned to London. Swamiji again plunged into work, meeting people and giving lectures. He sent Swami Saradananda to carry on the work in America. He also sent for Swami Abhedananda to come to England from India. Swami Abhedananda came and began to give public lectures. Swamiji was very happy at their success.

XV THE HERO RETURNS

SWAMI Vivekananda knew that Swami Abhedananda would be able to carry on the work successfully and therefore he began to think about returning to India. It was arranged that he would sail from Naples. Mr. Goodwin and Mr. & Mrs. Sevier were to accompany him. Before he left, an English friend asked him, "Swami, how do you like your motherland now after four years' experience of the luxurious, glorious, powerful West?"

Swamiji's reply was, "India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me; it is now the holy land—the place of pilgrimage, the Tirtha."

Swamiji's homecoming was a great event. The people of India had learned to love and admire him ever since the days of the Parliament of Religions. His name had often been in the papers and on the lips of the people, and they looked upon him as a great hero. Previously, the people of India felt weak and helpless. Now they felt stronger. Swamiji's success in the West gave them self-respect. Therefore, when he returned, the whole country rose to do him honour.



The horses were taken away from Swamiji's carriage and the Raja himself and many others pulled the carriage through the streets.

The ship arrived at Colombo on January 15, 1897. Swamiji was filled with joy and excitement. This was India! Once more he was to walk upon her holy soil! He did not know about the preparations that had been made to receive him. Reception committees were formed in the large cities and newspapers wrote editorials about him. One of his brother monks was at Colombo to receive him, and others were on the way or in Madras. When he stepped ashore in Colombo he found a huge crowd of people waiting to see him. Those who were near rushed to touch his feet. Then a huge procession was formed. Hymns were sung and many people threw flowers in the path before Swamiji. He stayed in Colombo for several days. He gave lectures and received visitors, the poor as well as the rich and powerful.

He had planned to travel from Colombo to Madras by steamer, but many telegrams poured in from different cities asking Swamiji to stop for at least a few minutes. He changed his plans and travelled over land, by train and carriage. At every town he would find people waiting to receive him. Often triumphal arches had been built for him and there were long processions with bands, fireworks, cannons and rockets. He would be presented with an address of welcome and in return would make a short speech.

He crossed over to the mainland by steamer, landing at Pamban. Here he was met by the Raja of Ramnad and many people, all of whom welcomed Swamiji with joy. The horses were taken away from Swamiji's carriage and the Raja himself and many others pulled the carriage through the streets. The next day Swamiji

visited the temple of Rameswaram. This reminded him of his wandering days, for he had visited the same places four years earlier. What a difference ! Then he was an unknown monk who had travelled through India on foot. Now he was famous, and great men competed with each other to show him honour and respect.

The triumphant tour continued. Swamiji passed through town after town—Ramnad, Madura, Kumbakonam, and many other places. Everywhere immense crowds gathered to meet Swamiji, to see him and listen to his words. The climax came when he reached Madras. As many as seventeen triumphal arches had been put up for him, and many groups presented him with addresses. Swamiji stayed in Madras for nine days. He delivered several important lectures and met many people.

XVI TO CALCUTTA

SWAMI Vivekananda became very tired as a result of the constant travel, meetings, lectures and interviews with people. He was not able to continue such strenuous work, so he decided to go to Calcutta by sea. He took a steamer with a few friends and disciples and enjoyed a few days of rest. The steamer docked at Kidderpore and from there Swamiji was taken by a special train to Sealdah station. Thousands of people were waiting at Sealdah to greet him and many of his brother monks were also there. Swamiji was given many flowers and garlands. There were so many people that Swamiji could hardly

move to the carriage. A group of college boys pulled the carriage. There was a great procession with bands, music and singing, banners and flowers. Thousands of people lined the road to see Swamiji.

During the nights Swamiji stayed at the Alambazar Math with his brother monks. During the days he stayed at a large house in Cossipore called Seal's Garden. Hundreds of people went there throughout the day to see Swamiji and hear him speak about Vedanta and the way to make India strong. After a week a great meeting was held to welcome him. A large and distinguished audience went to hear him speak. He gave one of his famous speeches on that occasion. He gave other talks and lectures while he stayed in Calcutta.

The birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was held soon after Swamiji reached Calcutta and he visited Dakshineswar. A large number of people had also gathered. He walked about from place to place, thinking about the old days when Sri Ramakrishna had lived there. Many other devotees of Sri Ramakrishna were present and he was glad to meet them.

Swamiji, of course, was especially glad to be with his brother monks at the Alambazar Math. They had much to talk about. Swamiji told them about his ideas for rebuilding India. He also told them what monks should do to serve others. His brother monks could not accept his ideas at first. They thought a monk should do nothing but pray, meditate and try to realize God. They did not think that a monk should work for others or run schools and hospitals. But Swamiji showed them that both ideas were good. What he wanted, he said, was to